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NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM EG

SUBJECT: GAMAL MUBARAK: DESPITE HIGH PROFILE, DOUBTS FROM  
WITHIN AND WITHOUT

REF: CAIRO 2010

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On the eve of Gamal Mubarak's unpublicized visit to Washington, he remains a decidedly controversial figure inside Egypt. Since reftel's analysis of Gamal's standing, vehement public skepticism continues and we are even hearing murmurs of dissent from within his own circle. Commentators depict him as arrogant and out of touch, a view widely held on the Egyptian street. A key ruling party insider recently confided to us his own personal frustration and doubts about Gamal and his leadership of the reform process. End summary.

¶2. (C) Maintaining his high domestic profile (reftel), Gamal Mubarak gave a well publicized press conference on May 4, on the eve of his departure for Europe and the United States (a trip so far unpublicized by the Egyptian media). The press conference followed a meeting of the ruling NDP's Policies Secretariat, a body created in 2002, allegedly tailor-made

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for him as a platform to enter national politics. Gamal refused to take questions about his presidential ambitions, insisting that his position on the subject was clear, and referred reporters to earlier interviews. (As discussed reftel, Gamal and proxies, including his father, adamantly deny the existence of any plan for him to succeed his father, though most Egyptians believe his actions speak louder than his words. Likewise, presidential advisor Osama El Baz reaffirmed on May 7 that there is no plan for Gamal to assume the presidency. El Baz rhetorically asked who, given the array of challenges facing Egypt today, would aspire to take such a difficult job?)

¶3. (C) Rather than discuss succession, in his May 4 press conference Gamal stressed his belief that the process of comprehensive economic and political reform in Egypt was pushing forward, on an "irreversible" course. He also asserted that the current confrontation between Egypt's Judges Club and the GOE-appointed Supreme Judiciary Council (septels) was an intra-judicial matter in which the NDP had no role. He dismissed the image of the GOE bullying and trying to cow Egypt's judiciary as an "illusion." Gamal also reaffirmed the government's commitment to replace the emergency law with a modern counterterrorism law within the next two years, and noted that this process will require amendments to the constitution. In response to another question, Gamal stated that discussion of further reforms to Egypt's electoral system would be "premature" for the moment.

¶4. (C) Writing May 7 in the influential independent daily Al-Masry Al-Youm, columnist Soliman Gouda bitterly attacked

Gamal's remarks at the press conference, which, he asserted, reflected the arrogance of a "commanding king." Gouda contended that Gamal's overall tone, and many of his specific references, indicated how out of touch he was with the views and concerns of common Egyptians and also highlighted the broader disconnect between the ruling NDP, which asserts that sweeping reforms are underway and the people, who disbelieve it. Gouda's view of Gamal as an elite and arrogant insider, out of touch with the Egyptian street, is widely held among our contacts. Strong opposition to perceived Gamal succession plans have also been a prominent side theme of ongoing demonstrations in late April and early May by groups protesting the "suppression" of Egypt's judges (septels).

¶5. (C) Along similar lines, but from an insider's perspective, a prominent businessman and key member of the NDP Policies Secretariat headed by Gamal told the DCM in late April that he was fed up with lack of progress toward substantive reform and was looking to disengage. The businessman complained that attendance at the Policies Secretariat is down to about one-third of its membership.

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The intense work in the committee in the run-up to the elections last fall had been held up as an example of the reformist activism at work in the NDP. Now, he said, there is no point in going; they just rehash the same conversations and make no progress. He told First Lady Suzanne Mubarak, whom he admires, that he is going to withdraw from party activities. She reportedly had urged him to stay the course but offered no assurances conditions would improve.

¶6. (C) The businessman lamented the mediocrity of the professors and other members who continue to participate in the policy committee. "These guys just do not have the fire power to get anything done," he opined. He laid blame for the drift at the feet of Gamal. "He has refused to lead," and this has created a vacuum of power in the party. "Many of us want him to step forward and assert himself but he is laying back, saying that he is not a candidate." This abdication of responsibility for the reform agenda, our contact suggested, left power in the hands of the old guard who were not interested in reform.

¶7. (C) Comment: The businessman's report adds to other murmurs of dissatisfaction with progress on the political reforms. Prominent intellectual Osama Ghazali Harb's very public break with the party was clearly intended to highlight the failure of Gamal's experiment of attracting leading reformers into the party. But this critique, coming from a respected business leader with close ties to the Mubarak family, suggests that the government's and the party's hype that progress is underway may be hollow.

¶8. (C) Comment continued: Assuming Gamal Mubarak's presidential ambitions are real, Egypt's existing legal framework clearly favors him, and no obvious contenders stand in his way. At the same time, public opinion toward his possible succession is decidedly hostile - a factor unlikely to change significantly in the near future. Perhaps most importantly, it is unclear whether the military, which has supplied each of Republican Egypt's three presidents to date, would support him. End comment.

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